

4

Photographer: Steven Eginoire
CORNERS GALLERY

Gardy Catsman reaping the benefits of a huge snow year near Silverton, Colorado.

Denying My Inner Black Diamond

Eleven years is a long time. That's long enough for the family dog to grow old and die. It has been 11 years since I skied. After all that time, I'm stepping back into the bindings this winter. But before I even lay down my money for a pass, I need to make peace with my inner black diamond.

I learned to ski on the crusted ice hills of Ohio. (Yes, powder-softened westerner, there is skiing in Ohio! And let me tell you, on the tilted ice rinks that pass for runs in the Midwest, one quickly learns the value of a sharp edge.) My mother had me on the slopes before I could ride a bike without training wheels. The runs were short, barely long enough to build up a head of steam. To make skiing entertaining on such terrain, I would get creative with what was there. I hunted for bumps, jumps, or a gap in the trees. On

my stunted Olins, the most benign cruiser became a black diamond. My mother had years whittled off her life watching me launch into spread eagles and half-cocked helicopters or disappear into the woods only to reemerge down trail with twigs skewering my Cleveland Browns knit cap.

I traveled west a couple times during those youthful, reckless winters. Copper Mountain, Big Sky, Park City — *vive la différence!* My young legs tore up more terrain in a day that I could cover in an entire season back home. But even with all that space and variety, my inner black diamond would whisper to me. *Dodging trees is fun! Moguls are easier if you jump every one of them! Hold that tuck!* And I would listen to it, adopting some heedless alter ego, Evel Knievel in snow pants.

My wife and I moved to Colorado a few years after college and were both excited to become local skiers. Brenda's more of a conservative skier, she sticks to the center of the hill

and carves big, uniform turns. I would stay in her tracks as long as I could, but occasionally I'd cut wide and snap off a quick daffy near the pines, cheating behind her back.

Skiing came to a halt for me two years after coming west. I amassed a laundry list of summertime injuries that kept me from the slopes: broken ankle playing soccer, separated shoulder mountain biking, two blown knees playing Ultimate, and a bad low back from throwing pottery. On top of that, my wife and I had four kids in four years. If I wasn't on crutches, domesticity hobbled any chance of making it to the mountains when the snow was flying.

Now, a year shy of 40 and over a decade of dust on my gear, I'm ready to ski again. The only problem: I still hear the voice. It eggs me on whenever I see a Warren Miller flick or hear the meteorologist sensationalize a big storm. All skiers and boarders probably have a black diamond voice in their head, an impish, raspy whisper telling them things like

by Jeff Osgood

the ski patrol are just the fuzz in red polyester. For more sensible people, the voice probably quiets over time, overtaken by wisdom and experience, maybe even muzzled by injury. My voice is still around. It taunts, declaring easy, green circle trails are for fat tourists and moderate, blue square runs are for, well, squares. It comes like poison poured in the ear. *Black is sexy. Diamonds are edgy. You're sexy and edgy. Go ahead, drop over that lip! Do it!*

I'm not sure what's going to silence the voice. Perhaps I'll try prayer, a whipped up exorcism on that first lift ride. Maybe music will do the trick, soothe it with some lazy folk or jar it loose with hard picking bluegrass. In the end, it will all come down to will power. I'll have to blind myself to the sumptuous curve of the mogul, the promised joy of the jump, and the mystery hidden in the trees. Clench the jaw and allow the shushing sound of the sweeping, safe turns be the only soundtrack on the slope. Shh-shh-shh.